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Kyla Hansen MFA Thesis Statement

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My work traces the migration of meaning, mashing up cultural signifiers of place to create absurd objects and physical spaces that employ the hazy nature of belief, memory, and nostalgia. I'm interested in the exportability and malleability of experiences both culturally (through objects in movies, music, and media) and personally (through memories that change over time). My work explores the elusiveness of realness, creating slippery spaces, where the real and fake overlap, and certainty and uncertainty intermingle.

I create prop-like objects that collapse spaces from the rural outskirts of town, the open desert, theatrical sets, and the interiors of suburban homes. They are cobbled together from rural desert debris, backyard junk, furniture remnants, synthetic casting materials, patterns, textiles, and text. Objects are altered and added to, Frankensteined together with glitter, whimsy, and blatant artifice.

Manipulated materials lie alongside and intermingle with found objects, confusing distinctions between the found and the fabricated, fact and fiction, fantasy and reality, memory and musing. The found objects generally remain intact, their forms not altered beyond recognition. Playful materials, colors, and textures may introduce a curious, fanciful state, but one foot always remains in the real world. The result is not a surreal shock to the environment, but rather a generous compilation of objects and spaces that rhyme with rural inventiveness, tied together by logic of form.

I am fascinated by the bizarre and ironic landscape of the western "country," one inseparable from storytelling, memory, and nostalgia. It is an odd mash-up of myths of the folkloric pastoral and piles of the apocalyptic postindustrial; the junkyard jumbled up with the garden. It exists as both a factual and fabricated fiction.

For similar reasons, I think about the way movies and media can affect personal nostalgia. The Hollywood “Western” genre creates a convincing fantasy of this landscape. Objects like tumbleweeds become cinematic signifiers of emptiness, loneliness, and distance. Movies have the ability to create a sense of nostalgia for things never experienced, and landscapes never known.

Rural country vernacular and music lyrics sneak into my work for their idiosyncratic relationship to American working-class culture, and appear in the work as an example of how specific regional phenomenon can be exported. Country Lyrics become malleable to different cultures as they are boiled down to simple tales of moving, migration, and regret, as they become a signifier of a simpler time or place.

Theatricality in the work is key to creating open spaces of possibility, in which objects maybe experienced untethered to conventional contexts. In my work, there is no specific narrative, rather a cultural mash-up of objects and props that invite the viewer to consider variable, open-ended possibilities.

Through the work, I strive to stir up something real within the fake. By creating environments that combine true, imagined, genuine, and imitation spaces, the work offers an experience of disparate things, collapsed into a single place, time, and space and relies only on the intuitive understanding of objects in the real world.

My work thrives on ambiguity. Doubt is integral to its meaning and function. Focusing on the oddity of the mundane world, it invites viewers to reflect on the ways we interact with objects and spaces through a mash-up of myth, memory, and experience.